MMR_0566 Leon Bangma Found Photo in Marker Lamp Winter 2015 was a President of LSR

The Rise and Fall of the Chinook Southern Railroad

Text and photos by Lee Bangma

Vintage photo

I started out with the typical Lionel train set at age five. At age fourteen I converted to HO scale, because it was more lifelike and the smaller size gave more space for realistic railroading. The Chinook Southern name was chosen in the mid-sixties and has continued to be the name since then. Over the years there have been several attempted versions, most of which never got close to completion.

In 1996, a move to a new house meant breaking it into sections and storage for a year. A year later it moved into the new house and was reassembled, with modifications to fit the new space. In retrospect, I should have demolished it and started from scratch, as compromises had to be made, and a lot of it was disassembled and redone anyway. However, all the track had been hand-laid and I didn't want to undo all the hard work and start over.

Things were progressing slowly until word came that the NMRA National convention would be held in Grand Rapids, Michigan in 2012. I decided to get as much done as possible before the convention and it seemed to work out well. The railroad was about 90% finished when convention time arrived. That week we operated trains on Monday, Wednesday, and Friday, for a total of over 30 hours.

During that time we were visited by people from coast to coast of the United States, Canada, Great Britain (U.K.) and Switzerland. It was great fun meeting all these different model railroaders from all over the world. If you ever have the chance, go to conventions and open your own railroad if possible for a convention in your area. It is well worth it.

Traveling section

In the late seventies a version was started in Michigan with some scenery included. Shortly thereafter a move to Texas meant the railroad was demolished and for most of the eighties, with no real space for a layout, the railroad was limited to an area eighteen inches deep by six feet long on top of a piece of furniture.

This section had both standard and three foot narrow gauge trackage used as an interchange area between the two. When we moved back to Michigan in 1990, that section came along and was incorporated into the new layout.

While preparing for the convention, the CSRR was visited by committee members to evaluate it for inclusion in the layout tours. Although back in the 1960's and in the 1980's I had entered some models in regional contests and had gotten some merit awards, I had done nothing else in working toward Master Model Railroader status in the NMRA's Achievement Program. When they visited, they immediately stated I would qualify for the Scenery award and wanted to know what other certificates I had already gotten. The answer, of course, was none. But, it started me thinking about it, and in

An overall view showing Chinook yard top right and Athenia below it,

September of 2013, I had the railroad evaluated for the Scenery, Civil Engineering, and Electrical Engineering certificates. Since I had hand-laid most of the trackage, including crossovers, switches, and a narrow/dual gauge conversion turnout, and the railroad was all wired up and working, the hardest work was in completing the application and required forms. If you have any interest in the achievement program, which you should if you've been in model railroading and the NMRA for any length of time, you should start by looking at your present railroad and what you've accomplished on it to see what qualifies and what more you need to do. There are members of your NMRA region and division who would be willing to help you along if you contact them.

In November and December of 2013 the CSRR was completely demolished, although the equipment, buildings, etc. were saved, in anticipation of a move back to Texas. We completed that move at the end of April, 2014, and settled into a house in McKinney, where the room formerly known as the media room has been re-purposed as "the train room" and the start of the new Chinook Southern RR.

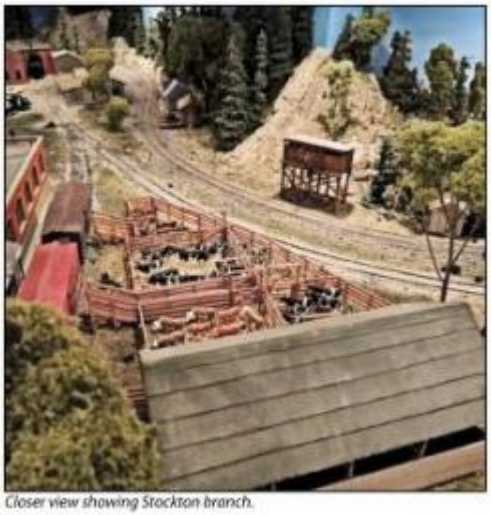
Overview of double deck showing town of Chinook on upper deck, center, town of Jugtown Mountain to the left, lower deck shows Stockton branch on the right, Phantom Cove center, and Columbine to the left.

The CSRR is a railroad set in south-west Colorado roughly in the 1950's although, being a freelance road, there are some deviations and anachronisms. A few newer autos can be found, and some scenes appear to be more from the late 1800's than the 1950's. The RR was built as a point-to-loop plan, with Chinook yard on the uppermost level, with part of the yard dual-gauged.

At Chinook the Poudre Valley three foot narrow gauge splits off. The CSRR then passes through the town of Jugtown Mountain, and down grade to Friesen Flats, past Dutch Hill to the town of Schooley's Mountain. From there it goes through Fairplay to the lower deck areas of Columbine, Phantom cove, and Athenia where it also services the Stockton branch and turns on the loop around Athenia city to start the return up the hill to Chinook yard.

All motive power is smaller steam engines, and most cars are thirty to forty foot long except for a few that are fifty feet long. Control is by N.C.E. DCC with both wireless and tethered throttles. The program developed by the JMRI group has been used for operations and car forwarding.

Closer view of Phantom Cove



Closer view showing Stockton branch.

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Typically, trains originate in Chinook yard and proceed south to Athenia. Most trains are local or peddler freights, although occasionally a special train will be run.

There are also routine passenger trains on the schedule to handle passenger traffic, since the CSRR is located in the mountains and roads are not always easily transversed. Motive power is usually Bachmann 2-10-0 decapods and 4-4-0 Americans, and occasionally 2-8-0 Consolidations at present. Larger engines are occasionally run, and the hope is to eventually put some older brass imports back into operation, although they need to be reworked and converted to DCC. Cars are from a variety of manufacturers, some are over fifty actual years old, and most are wooden or earlier metal forty footers to fit the era being modeled.

View showing the transition area between the double decks and the single deck area.

Buildings are also from a variety of manufacturers, mostly kit built, but also some are completely scratch-built. There are buildings made of wood, plastic, metal, card stock, and plaster.

There were many small scenes built into the scenery. In fact, we have used a sheet of "things to find", to stimulate more careful looking at the railroad, and a better appreciation of what had been accomplished.

The new CSRR is currently under construction as a point-to-point with yards at both ends, on two decks with a helix used to move from upper to lower deck. Hopefully, it will be operable by the LSR 2016 convention to be held in the Dallas/Fort Worth area. Here are a few photos of the progress so far. Most of the track is in and operating on the lower level, along with basic scenery. On the upper level, things are also progressing.

However, the scenery base is being built prior to laying track, although the track base is being put in first. And I generally tend to lay the ballast down last, after everything is done and operating satisfactorily, so no ballast has been laid yet.

So, as you can see, although there are no ashes to rise from, just like the Phoenix, the Chinook Southern is rising again! ML